

# **New Jersey Catholic Conference**

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## **N E W S   R E L E A S E**

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### **NJCC Applauds Governor Corzine's Proposals to Help Low and Moderate Income Families Facing Tough Financial Times**

The New Jersey Catholic Conference (NJCC) applauds Governor Jon S. Corzine's call for the Legislature to provide immediate assistance to low- and moderate-income families who are facing tough financial times. This proposal would also provide assistance to individuals with a fixed income, such as seniors and people with disabilities. The problems these individuals face are severe and increasing.

For example, the Community FoodBank of New Jersey recently indicated a 20 percent increase this year in the number of people seeking food assistance. In fact, some of these agencies, in hard-hit areas, have reported a 30 percent spike in people seeking food assistance.

According to Marlene Lao-Collins, Director of Social Concern for the New Jersey Catholic Conference, "Food banks and pantries in New Jersey have been overwhelmed by the increase in the number of people seeking food assistance. We have heard very

frightening reports of food banks and pantries closing because they were unable to keep pace with the increasing demand.” The NJCC supports Governor Corzine’s proposal to provide an additional \$3M to the food banks. We welcome the Governor’s call for businesses and individuals to make donations directly to the food banks or local food pantries.

“We are also very concerned that soon cold weather will set in and many needy families will come to Catholic Charities looking for assistance to heat their home. Each year our agencies run out of money very early,” said Lao-Collins. This year the Federal Government has increased funding for the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). We appreciate that the Governor has proposed expanding the income eligibility of this program from 175% of the Federal Poverty Level (family of four \$37,100) to 200% FPL (family of four \$42,400), and increasing the benefit amount to \$1,000. Given New Jersey’s high cost of living this increase to the income eligibility is closer to the real poverty level. We also support Governor Corzine’s call to increase funding available to NJ SHARES, which provides energy assistance to households that are not eligible for LIHEAP benefits. As many as 11,000 households will receive help as a result of the Governor’s initiative.

According to Lao-Collins, “There is a real urgency to address these problems and we applaud Governor Corzine’s plan for food and energy assistance. We urge the NJ Senate and General Assembly to support these proposals. We also urge the public to increase their donations to local organizations that provide assistance to those in need.”

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